

W.S. 1.124
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILI'TA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1.124

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1.124.....

Witness

Daniel Kearns,
Oldcastle,
Kiltulla,
Athenry,
Co. Galway.
Identity.

Lieutenant and later Captain Kilconiron
Company Irish Volunteers Co. Galway.

Subject.

- (a) Kilconiron Company Irish Volunteers
Co. Galway, 1914-1921;
- (b) Attack on Bookeen R.I.C. Barracks 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2416.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUNO STAIRE MILEATA 2013/21/124
No. W.S. 1124

STATEMENT BY DANIEL KEARNS

Oldcastle, Kiltulla, Co. Galway.

I was born on 18th October 1897, and went to Esker National School, Athenry, until I reached 15 years of age. After leaving school I worked on my father's farm.

I joined the Irish Volunteers about the month of July 1914. The name of the company was Kilconiron and the company area coincided with that of the parish of Kilconiron. Mr. Stephen Jordan of Athenry, afterwards a djutant of the Athenry Battalion, was our first instructor. From him we learned some foot drill, a little arms drill and, in addition, we had some little practice in firing out of a .22 rifle. All drilling was done openly. Parades were held once a week, usually on week nights, and we had our practice with the .22 rifle, on Sundays as a general rule. At the time we had no other kind of rifle to practice with.

Our first big public parade was the occasion of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral. Roughly about 30 of the company travelled to Dublin to take part in the funeral parade. We were supplied with pikes in Athenry. The total number of Volunteers from Galway who took part in the funeral parade was about 400. They were accompanied by a band from Galway city. The late Larry Lardner of Athenry was in charge of all the Galway Volunteers on the occasion. He was the Volunteer officer in charge of all Galway up to the Rising. I heard him say at one time that Padraig Pearse put him in charge of Connaught before the Rising.

I remember Pearse speaking the oration at the graveside but did not hear him very distinctly owing to the fact that the Volunteers from Dublin, Cork and Limerick were nearer to the graveside than the Galway contingent. Liam Mellows was in prison at this time, having been arrested in Athenry. I

remember our party shouting "Up Mellows".

Liam Mellows attended parades of our company on many occasions during 1915 and 1916. He lectured a good deal on the aims of the Volunteers. In addition to the lectures, he continually emphasised the importance of making use of every scrap of cover. He talked about cover from view and cover from fire. I remember him saying at one time that use should be made of a stone even the size of a man's fist. "Get your head behind it" he said, "it may save your life". He was very keen that we should become good scouts. In those pre-1916 days I remember attending a meeting at Athenry at which The O'Rahilly spoke, but my recollection of it is now hazy.

The first inkling I got of the Rising was at an I.R.B. meeting about two months before it took place. The late Mr. Richard Murphy of Athenry was Co. Centre at that time. He attended the meeting at which we got the hint of the Rising. In his address to us he urged us to get hold of all the arms we could and said that there was hope of help from Germany. He made no reference to the date of the Rising; indeed, he did not mention the word rising.

I had been sworn into the I.R.B. by John Hannaffy, afterwards captain of Kilconiron Company early in the year 1915. Meetings of the local Centre members were held roughly once a month. About 15 attended, some of whom were too old for membership of the Volunteers.

The first I heard of the Rising was on Easter Monday evening 1916, when I got word to be at Moyode with whatever arms I had on the following day. I do not remember who brought me word, but I remember distinctly going to Moyode as directed on Easter Tuesday in company with Volunteer Patrick Naughton. It was only $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from my home. We were both armed with shotguns and each of us had a small share of cartridges. When we got to Moyode Gate House, the place appointed for the meeting of our company, some few members of the company were

there already. Others were coming singly or in pairs. In all, about fourteen members were present out of a total company strength of 50 men. The company captain, Patrick Coy, afterwards a brigade staff officer, Galway South East Brigade, took charge of the men who turned out.

The fourteen of us, under Captain Coy, proceeded to the Agricultural Station at Athenry after receiving a dispatch brought from Larry Lardner by Volunteer Christopher Barrett of Athenry Company. When we arrived at the Agricultural Station we met Volunteers from Athenry, Clarenbridge, Craughwell, Oranmore, Castlegar, Maree and Claregalway. We billeted in the Agricultural Station that night. Liam Mellows was in charge of the Volunteers, roughly about 750 men. Alf Monaghan was with Mellows, but I do not know what position he held as regards control. The 750 men were all armed in some way. I would say that there were about 150 rifles of various patterns including some .22s. The great majority of the remainder were armed with shotguns. I saw men armed with pikes about 20 roughly, and even a few men with ordinary hayforks.

On Wednesday morning, fire was opened on the Agricultural Station from a range of about 100 yards. Mellows ordered riflemen out to meet the attack. He placed Eamon Corbett, then a brigade staff officer, and afterwards a member of Dáil Éireann, in charge of the party of riflemen. The exchange of shots lasted, I would say, about eight to ten minutes, after which the attackers, who turned out to be a party of R.I.C., withdrew. It was rumoured that one of the R.I.C. was wounded in the leg. There was no casualty on our side. On Wednesday evening we left the Agricultural Station and went to Moyode Castle about four miles away. On arrival at Moyode Castle sentries were posted. They were placed in a circle at vantage points about 300 yards out from the Castle. The two gate-houses front and rear were also guarded. I did sentry for some time shortly after arrival.

The only incident worthy of note during our stay in Moyode Castle occurred at Rahard on Thursday. A small party of Volunteers who went out to forage for potatoes were attacked by a party of R.I.C. at Rahard. Stephen Jordan of Athenry Company, afterwards adjutant of Athenry Battalion, was in charge of the forage party. He told me later that the R.I.C. party numbered only about four or five. He said that the range was about 500 yards and that no casualties had been suffered by either party when the R.I.C. withdrew. We remained at Moyode Castle on Thursday night and Friday.

We moved to Limepark on Friday evening, a distance of, say, 10 miles. The reason for this may have been the receipt of information that a British troop train had arrived in Loughrea from Dublin. I remember well the name of the regiment these troops belonged to as they escorted me to Dublin after I had been made prisoner the week after the Rising. The name was Notts and Derbys.

Meetings of the officers were going on; there seemed to be an air of uneasiness; it leaked out that things were not going so well in Dublin. Liam Mellows addressed us before leaving Moyode Castle. He pointed out how poorly we were armed in comparison with the forces opposing us and that he considered it better to move off towards the hills. So we moved off in the evening to Limepark. It was dusk when we arrived there. Two or three hours after we arrived we were disbanded. I remember Mellows addressing us at Limepark. He said only a few words. I cannot remember all he said, but I remember he said that it was a matter for our own choice to return home or go on the run. He also thanked us for turning out.

I returned home to Oldcastle where I was made prisoner the following Tuesday, 3rd May. I was taken to Loughrea and kept there one night. I was removed to Galway Jail on

Wednesday and kept there for a week when I was removed to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. After a fortnight there I was deported to Perth. After a month I was released. My fellow prisoners were released in batches of five or six without questioning or any kind of trial. I was home about the end of June 1916.

The company was reorganised in 1917. Officers were:- Captain, John Hannaffy; 1st Lieutenant, Myself; 2nd Lieutenant, Thomas Kennedy. Total strength was about 30. Prior to 1916 Kilconiron and Closetoken were one company. In the re-organisation they became separate companies, hence the smaller number. Some of those who had failed to turn out in 1916 came along and joined and no questions were asked. Parades were held once a week. There was the usual foot drill. Arms were collected from friendly people in the company area.

There is very little to relate of the remainder of 1917 or of 1918, except that I took an active part in the election campaign of 1918. The constituency was South Galway and the Sinn Fein candidate was Frank Fahy, afterwards Ceann Comhairle. Dáil Éireann. I and my company made a canvass of the company area and helped to safeguard voters in the town of Loughrea on election day. We were ordered into the town in full force on polling night. There was a very rowdy mob in Loughrea that was interfering against Sinn Fein and the object of drafting Volunteers into the town was to try and give freedom of action to the Sinn Fein candidate's supporters. We were armed with sticks, having been specially told not to bring arms of any kind. The mob quietened as there was a big number of Volunteers from all the companies in the battalion. The R.I.C. were particularly hostile to the Volunteers. Every place they came across parties of the Volunteers they charged them with batons and rifle butts. I saw an R.I.C. man with a broken rifle in his hands. He had aimed a vicious blow at a Volunteer

but hit the pavement instead of the man.

As far as I can remember, parades in the years 1917 and 1918 were held once a fortnight. There was no very great enthusiasm except during the conscription scare. In 1919 there was little activity that I can remember except the usual parades. It was a quiet year in the company area. In the Spring of 1920 things began to brighten up. Volunteer activity in other parts of the country had an encouraging effect on us. In March 1920 (I cannot remember the exact date) I attended a meeting of the officers of my own company at which we received a dispatch from Gilbert Morrissey, O/C. Athenry Battalion, saying that it was proposed to attack Moyvilla R.I.C. Barracks a week later and to send three men to Moyvilla on the night specified. The remainder of the company were to block all roads in the company area which reinforcements could use.

On the night appointed for the attack, Volunteer Patrick Kennedy, a brother of ^{the} 2nd Lieut. - Volunteer James Ryan, a Tipperary Volunteer staying with me at the time, and I myself went as directed to Moyvilla. We met the main body of Volunteers mobilised for the attack behind Coldwood National School, a quarter of a mile on the Craughwell side of Moyvilla. They numbered about 35 to 40 men armed with rifles and shotguns with Commandant Gilbert Morrissey, O/C. Athenry, in charge; Commandant Morrissey addressed the whole body. He said he considered that the conditions laid down by the Brigade O/C. regarding the attack were so impossible that he could not see his way to carry on with it. He enumerated the conditions, some of which I remember. Those I remember were:-

- (1) The attack was to be commenced at midnight and concluded not later than 12.25 a.m.
- (2) The Battalion O/C. was to be held responsible for any casualties suffered by the attacking party.
- (3) All the attacking party were to be masked.

I have not the slightest idea as to why these conditions

were laid down, although they have remained in my memory. I have no further opinion or point of view in regard to them except that they were most foolish.' The Brigade O/C. was Mr. Seamus Murphy. He was not the same Murphy who was County Centre I.R.B. in 1916 whose name was Richard Murphy and a native of Athenry, Co. Galway. The Brigade O/C., Mr. Seamus Murphy, was not a Galway man. He managed a newspaper - The Galway Express - in addition to carrying out his duties as Brigade O/C., Galway Brigade. I understand that he had taken part in the Rising in Dublin in 1916, and that he left Galway some time towards the end of 1920. That's as far as I can go in regard to Mr. Seamus Murphy except that I heard he had got some big post as Commissioner for the Dublin Board of Assistance or some Local Authority in Dublin.

We were then dismissed by the Battalion O/C. The R.I.C. barracks at Moyvilla was a two-storeyed slated building with four rooms on top and three on the ground floor. The garrison consisted of one sergeant and eleven men. The plan of attack was that the gable was to be mined and blown in ^{and} the building rushed through the breach. Two Volunteers from Galway University Company were to carry out the mining operation. They both came to do the job. One of them was named Whelan. I cannot remember the name of the second.

The next operation I remember was the attack on Bookeen R.I.C. Barracks, situated between Kiltulla and Loughrea and one mile from Kiltulla. It was a two-storey building. The first I heard of the proposed attack was from Patrick Callanan (The Hare) a brigade staff officer. He was then, I think, brigade vice-commandant. He sent word to me to meet him near Craughwell on the Sunday before 1st July 1920. I met him as instructed. He told me that Bookeen Barracks was to be attacked the following Thursday night; that Comdt. Gilbert Morrissey was to deliver a quantity of gelignite and some detonators at

my house on the Tuesday night together with the rifles to be used at the attack; that two engineers from University College Galway Company were to be brought to my house by Volunteer Michael Kelly of Clarenbridge Company on the Thursday, the night of the attack; that all roads in my company area leading to Bookeen were to be blocked by the men of my company except for five men who were to take part in the attack proper. These were the instructions I got from "The Hare". I was acting company captain at that time.

On the following Tuesday night Commandant Morrissey and some Volunteers delivered the gelignite, detonators and rifles at my house. There were 12 to 14 rifles which I cleaned next day. On the following night I got four tins of petrol from Athenry Company delivered by Volunteer Joseph Curran, now in the United States. On Thursday night "The Hare", Commandant Morrissey and Volunteers from ~~Athenry and~~ Craughwell Companies met in my house. The two engineers from U.C.G. Company had not turned up, neither had Volunteer Michael Kelly from Clarenbridge who was to meet them at Oranmore railway station and convey them to my house. The failure of the two engineers and Kelly to turn up was discussed and it was decided to carry on without them. The plan was to break through the roof and to burn the building. Edward Burke, Captain of Killimor Daly Company, volunteered to mount the roof of the barracks, break a hole in it and set it on fire with the petrol.

We left my house when it was nearly dark. We met Volunteers from Closetoken, Kilnadeema, Bullaun and Killimor Daly Companies at Dunsandle, less than a quarter of a mile from the barracks. There were altogether about 38 men in the attack, roughly 14 riflemen at the front of the barracks and the remainder armed with shotguns nearer the building towards the gables. Two men were detailed to watch the back. Shotgun

men controlled the window at each gable. I myself was at the front of the building armed with a Lee-Enfield rifle. The range would be about 30 to 40 yards. When we all had our positions taken up, Captain Burke with four men put a ladder up to the gable at the Kiltulla side. Captain Burke mounted the ladder and broke slates on the roof at the back with a stone hammer. He then threw in a bucket of petrol through the hole he had made. The petrol had been poured out of the tins into the bucket to save time. There may have been two buckets. Captain Patrick Coy of Closetoken Company, afterwards a brigade staff officer, Galway South East Brigade, and Volunteers Stephen Lawless, Michael Hanlon and Hubert Dillon of Killimor Daly Company, helped Captain Burke. Someone handed up a torch with a long handle to Captain Burke so that he could descend a few steps of the ladder and have some protection when he ignited the petrol. It seemed to me to be about ten minutes before the flames sprang up after Captain Burke had applied the lighted torch. No firing took place in that time. Comdt. Morrissey said to me that they must have left the barracks. I said: "They were there yesterday anyhow". No sooner had I the word out of my mouth than we heard a loud explosion at the Kiltulla gable, through which the garrison had hurled a grenade. That was the first action by the garrison, but Capt. Burke and his assistants had completed their task and had taken cover by the time the grenade exploded.

We opened fire immediately, concentrating on the windows and doors at the front of the building. All the five windows at the front (two on the ground floor and three on the first floor) had steel shutters. Fire from the garrison, who numbered 12 or 13 (all R.I.C.) was very heavy and very accurate. We had to keep well down for a while until we got some fairly big stones and with them formed some improvised loopholes. The fire from the garrison continued heavy and

accurate for at least half an hour until they were forced down to the ground floor by the heat of the roof on fire over their heads. The attack went on for at least two hours until the roof caved in. Before it finally caved in we could hear explosions inside. Some of the explosions were light, others ^{very} heavy. One particularly heavy explosion shook the ground where we were about 35 yards away. It could have been caused by a box of grenades.

The garrison got two chances to surrender. About five minutes after firing was opened "The Hare" blew one blast on a whistle. This was a pre-arranged signal for cease fire. He called on the garrison to surrender. The only reply he got was a blast of rifle fire. Later on, in the course of attack, there was another cease fire and the garrison were again asked to surrender but they did not do so. Some of our men were shouting threats at them which did not help as far as the surrender was concerned. At one time during the attack there was a withdrawal by the I.R.A. of about 200 yards owing to a belief that cavalry were about to attack us. It was learned in a few minutes that this was not correct. What really happened was that some horses nearby took fright at the firing and galloped along the road. That is what gave rise to the cavalry rumour. The truth of the matter was learned very quickly and I would say that the withdrawal did not affect the position in the least.

The attack was called off when the roof fully caved in and the building was a complete wreck. It was then believed that the garrison all had perished in the flames. No approach was made to the ruins by the Volunteers. I myself certainly believed that the garrison had perished in the fire and I am positive that all the Volunteers engaged in the attack believed likewise that the garrison had perished in the flames. Even if it occurred to us to approach the burning building it would not,

in my opinion, have been possible to do so owing to the fire and explosions. There was no time for dallying as it was clear daylight when we left the scene of the attack. The nights were then at their shortest, as the date of the attack was the 1st of July. There were no casualties on our side. I heard the next day that the garrison had escaped by crawling into a little wash-house in the back yard and that they walked into Loughrea without tunics or caps. Some were barefooted, but all brought their rifles with them.

During the remainder of the year 1920, there was no major operation. There were some raids for arms and some raids on mails. Moyode Castle and Tally Ho House were burned to prevent them being occupied by enemy forces. The same applies to the year 1921 up to the Truce. Many factors militated against the progress of work after the attack on Bookeen Barracks, including -

1. the arrest of Patrick Callanan, "The Hare," who was a brigade staff officer;
2. Stephen Jordan and James Barrett, two staff officers of Athenry Battalion, were arrested,
3. Sean Broderick, a brigade staff officer, was arrested. He afterwards became a member of Dáil Éireann,
4. Brigadier Murphy seems to have left Co. Galway some time before the end of 1920 and we had no brigade O/C. until Joseph Stanford was appointed on a reorganisation about April 1921. Michael Brennan of Clare was in charge of the reorganisation.

By the time this reorganisation was completed, it was quite close to the Truce.

I had no members of Cumann na mBan in my company area. We had a Parish Court, but I did not take much interest in it. There were also Republican Police officers appointed, but again I am afraid I took very little interest in them, so that I am not now in a position to relate anything of interest concerning them.

I would like to pay a tribute to the people of my area, to the local people generally. They did everything possible to help the I.R.A. Their houses were open to us for food and shelter at all times of the day and night. They regarded it as a privilege to render us any service big or little. They took many risks and were cheerful about them. It is my opinion that without their help we could have achieved very little.

I append a list of the names of the officers and men who took part in the attack on Bookeen R.I.C. Barracks, as far as I can remember them. It is with some reluctance that I give the list in case I may, owing to the length of time that has elapsed, omit the name of anybody who did in fact take part.

BOOKEEN I.R.A. BARRACK ATTACK.

List of the names of the officers and men who participated.

Craughwell Coy. Area.

Patrick Callanan ("The Hare"),	Brigade Staff Officer
Gilbert Morrissey,	O/C. Athenry Battalion
Martin Rooney	Coy. Capt. Craughwell Company
John Morrissey	Volunteer
John Rooney	"
Patk. Jos. Morrissey	"
Jeremiah Deely	"
Anthony Fahy	"
John Maloney	"
Patrick Hynes	"
Stephen Furey	"

Kilconiron Company

Daniel Kearns (self)	Company Captain
Thomas Kennedy	Lieutenant
Patrick Kennedy	Volunteer
John Kearns	"
Dominick Cooney	"

Killimor Daly Company

Edward Burke	Company Captain
Hubert Dillon	Lieutenant
Michael Hanlon	Volunteer
Stephen Lawless	"

Bullaun Company

Michael Healy	Company Captain
Martin Nevin	Lieut. - afterwards Battalion Staff Officer

Closetoken Company

Patrick Coy.	Coy. Captain - afterwards Brigade Staff Officer
Patrick Connaughton	Lieutenant - afterwards Coy. Captain
Frank Fallon	Volunteer
Patrick Tierney	"
Michael Keogh	"

Kilnadeema Company

Laurence Kelly	Coy. Captain - afterwards O/C. Galway South East Brigade.
John Kelly	Volunteer - afterwards Brigade Engineer, Galway South East Brigade.

and a few others of Kilnadeema Company whose names I cannot recall to mind.

Leitrim Company

Bartly Leahy
Patrick Leahy
Michael Grace.

Signed: Daniel Kearns

(Daniel Kearns)

Date: 9th March 1955

Witness: Con Moynihan

(Con Moynihan)

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